

Principals' Workshop Report: Collaborating for Student Success

Offered by the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals and Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership collaboratively with The College of William and Mary and the Virginia Department of Education

Workshop Presenter: Dr. Marilyn Friend

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January 29, 2007 – Williamsburg

January 30 – Fredericksburg

March 26 – Richmond

March 27 – Lynchburg

October 23 – Bristol

VASSP and VFEL in collaboration with The College of William and Mary and the Virginia Department of Education offered five (5) workshops throughout the Commonwealth for middle level and high school principals accompanied by their lead teachers interested in the challenge of collaborative teaching (total of two participants per school). A memorandum was mailed to each middle level and high school principal in the Commonwealth inviting them and their lead teachers to attend. The memorandums were sent with a brochure in the fall of 2006, spring of 2007, and summer of 2007. Personalized detailed letters were written to each division superintendent in the fall of 2006, spring 2007, and summer of 2007 encouraging their school divisions' participation in the workshops. In addition, broadcast faxes were sent prior to each workshop date to all division superintendents, middle level and high school principals. Information was also posted on the VASSP Web site at www.vapincipal.org. Planned attendance at the workshops was limited to 125 schools for a total of 250 persons per workshop site. Sixty-one (61) school divisions participated in the workshop series. Actual attendance rosters for each workshop location are available.

Editors: Roger Jones, David Blevins, Randy Barrack, and Patricia Abrams

Introduction and Overview

This report summarizes Dr. Marilyn Friend's presentation at five workshops during 2007. Dr. Friend is the author of *Collaborating for Student Success* (© Marilyn Friend, Inc. 2007). Also included are the workshop participants' comments related to best practices in their schools, areas where improvement is needed, and recommendations for resources to improve inclusive practices in their schools.

The purpose of the workshops was to encourage participants to renew conversations at their schools around the concept of least restrictive environment (LRE) and access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Shared understanding of trends, vocabulary, issues, and delivery options are essential to creating learning environments that meet the needs of all students. The objectives of the workshop included a focus on:

1. trends in education and special education;
2. vocabulary;

3. principles for creating inclusive schools;
4. service delivery, including co-teaching;
5. issues related to inclusive practices; and
6. factors critical to systems change.

Trends in Education and Special Education

In focusing on the academic achievement of students with disabilities, there are a number of questions, topics, and concerns that arise. These include providing continuous training, developing an appropriate schedule, understanding terminology, motivating those who resist collaboration, co-teaching in reality, and personality issues between general education and special education teachers.

The first step in dealing with these issues is to engage in conversation at the division and school levels to address concerns. As Dr. Marilyn Friend noted, “If we can’t talk to each other, how can we communicate with staff, parents, and the community?” Principals should assume responsibility for being an instructional leader and must initiate or extend the conversation around student achievement in their schools.

Such a collaborative effort is even more important today because of high stakes accountability driven by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA). This federal legislation requires that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for subgroups of students including those with disabilities, and that all students be taught by highly qualified teachers.

Vocabulary

Having a conversation and creating an environment requires that the participants operate with a common vocabulary. Collaboration, inclusion, and co-teaching are different practices that are often used interchangeably, but they are separate and distinct. Generating school success starts with a common understanding of the vocabulary. Everyone in a school should understand what you are discussing. Key terms include the following.

Collaboration is how we go about working together. It is a style. It is voluntary. Assigned proximity is not collaboration. Schools must have a collaborative culture with mutual goals. These goals must be ones to which everyone is committed. Principals should create an environment where teachers can disagree with each other, but they will remain respectful. Principals must teach people how to collaborate and develop a culture of collaboration. It is a way that we work in schools where shared responsibility drives key decisions.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a term identified in the IDEA. LRE includes a continuum of placements that allows students to meet the Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. In an inclusive school, educators first assume that students with disabilities should be in an environment that most closely resembles that of their peers without disabilities while still succeeding academically.

Mainstreaming is a term used in the initial interpretation of LRE in which students with disabilities receive their education with nondisabled peers if they can achieve at approximately the same level with some support as they would achieve in a special education classroom. For some students with significant disabilities, mainstreaming often occurs in nonacademic areas (i.e., art, music, or physical education) or during non-instructional times such as lunch or assemblies. The term inclusion should not be used for this practice.

Inclusion is a philosophy or set of beliefs based on the idea that students with disabilities have the right to be members of classroom communities with nondisabled peers, whether or not they can meet the traditional expectations of those classrooms. Inclusion is based on the notion that all students can make valuable contributions to a class. It is not so much about where students sit as how they are viewed by teachers, other staff members, and peers. Schools working toward being inclusive use their mission statement as a start and make sure that students make progress on the IEP.

Integration means the merging of educational components that contribute to inclusion. Three components are considered: the physical integration of students, the social integration of students, and the instructional integration of students.

Co-teaching is one common service delivery option used in inclusive schools. In this arrangement, two or more professionals share responsibility for a diverse group of students for some or all of the school day in order to combine their expertise to meet student needs.

Principles for Creating Inclusive Schools

Dr. Friend provided characteristics associated with effective inclusive practices. An inclusive school is concerned with physical, social, and instructional integration. Physical integration means that students attend the school they would attend if they did not have a disability. This is true for students with high incidence disabilities as well as those with low incidence disabilities. Students attend class with their nondisabled peers in all cases unless, even with significant supports, this cannot be accomplished, a decision made by the IEP team. Social integration means that students are full class members. They have the same desks, materials, and storage spaces as other students, and they are included in class activities, field trips, rewards, and consequences. They are spoken to as any other class members, not as “foreigners.” They are part of the friendships that form in the classroom, and they are part of the normal give and take that occurs in a large

group of youngsters. Instructional integration means that students receive instruction at an appropriate level within the general education classroom. For many students, this implies that the traditional curriculum is provided and instructional methods are adapted to meet student needs. For a few, an adapted curriculum is the basis for instruction.

Dr. Friend stressed the concept that special education services are provided to help students succeed in the general curriculum. It is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Special education is a service, not a placement.

Service Delivery Systems in Collaborative and Inclusive Schools

In a collaborative and inclusive school, there should be a wide variety of service delivery options emphasizing collaboration. Collaboration between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher is required in all of the delivery options. Service delivery options include the following.

Support in classrooms. Sometimes services should be delivered in a general education setting, but the partnership required in co-teaching is not needed or not appropriate. Support might be offered where paraprofessionals assist students in general education classrooms.

Consultation. In consultation, a professional such as a psychologist, behavior specialist, speech-language pathologist, or special educator meets on a regular basis with teachers to problem solve. By jointly identifying a problem, systematically developing an intervention, gathering data, and judging the interventions' effectiveness, teachers and consultants can maximize student learning.

Teaming. Grade-level elementary teams (or primary or intermediate teams), middle school teams, and interdisciplinary or departmental high school teams meet regularly to discuss curriculum and problem solve about students. Special educators and other support providers can join these teams to help create strategies and interventions as well as to address issues related to curricular adaptations. This helps to make communication more consistent and more efficient.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching enables teachers or other licensed professionals to form instructional partnerships for the purpose of delivering high quality instruction to diverse classroom groups. Generally, students with disabilities or other special needs benefit from this option but so do students who are gifted/talented, students who are typical learners, and students who are at-risk for school failure.

Informal problem solving. Teachers in inclusive schools often need to meet one-to-one to proactively or reactively problem solve regarding students they share. For example, a classroom teacher and a special education teacher might meet to discuss accommodations a student with an IEP might need for an upcoming field trip.

Instruction in a separate setting. Although the goal in an inclusive school is for most instruction to occur in general education settings, occasionally student needs, determined by the IEP team, indicate this is not appropriate. Examples of situations in which instruction in a separate setting might be preferred include a student needing some type of physical or occupational therapy that needs privacy or more space, a student who needs highly specialized speech therapy, a student not learning as expected so that diagnostic teaching is needed, or a student whose behavior requires a small, structured environment.

Collegial staff development. A hallmark of inclusive schools is the sense that there is always new information that can help teachers better address student needs. When teachers and administrators attend workshops, classes, or other staff development opportunities, they share what they have learned with colleagues.

Issues Related to Inclusive Practices

Once principals understand the elements necessary for inclusive practices, they have to put the pieces together. Dr. Friend provided the following advice.

- Start with a concentrated effort to build a collaborative school community.
- Share information about inclusive schools, what they look like, and how they function.
- Encourage understanding and acceptance of the principles of inclusive schools.
- Create effective and feasible service options for educating all students in the school.
- Emphasize best practices relating to both instruction and behavior.

Principals should be familiar with the research on effective instruction. To the extent that special education teachers only function as an assistant in the general education classroom, achievement is not impacted; however, when teachers actually co-teach, student achievement increases.

Co-teaching occurs when two or more licensed educators share purposeful instruction for a single group of students primarily in a single classroom. They share joint accountability for student success. The level of participation for the two teachers may vary. Examples of co-teaching are noted below. Using a variety of strategies is best. Some strategies are best used for shorter periods of time while others can be used more extensively. After each strategy, there is a recommended maximum use.

- **One teach, one observe** occurs when one person teaches and the other observes. The observer's purpose is to generate data to improve instruction. For example, the observer may focus on student engagement or time-on-task. This strategy is best used if employed only 5-10% of the time.
- **Station teaching** is recommended early in the co-teaching process. Each teacher

teaches a different concept or skill, and students rotate from one teacher to the other. This strategy can be effectively used 30-40% of the time.

- **Parallel teaching** is also recommended early in the process. Each teacher teaches the same information, but the class is divided so that teachers have a better opportunity to respond to individual needs. This strategy can also be used 30-40% of the time.
- **Alternative teaching** is good for remediation, enrichment, and re-teaching. In alternative teaching, one teacher works with the large group while the other teacher works with the smaller group. This is best used about 20% of the time.
- **Teaming** is when both teachers are delivering the same instruction at the same time. It is the most complex style of co-teaching. Teachers play off each other like a “tag team.” This strategy is best if used 20-30% of the time.
- **One teach, one assist** allows one teacher to provide the primary teaching responsibility while the second teacher moves around the room providing individual assistance as needed to students. This strategy should not be used over 20% of the time.

An excellent tool to discuss and review the above options with teachers is a DVD titled “The Power of Two.” It is available through the Forum on Education at www.forumoneducation.org.

Finding time for collaboration is critical for success. Dr. Friend provided a variety of ideas to assist principals in finding this critical time. These ideas are noted below.

- Use other adults to help cover classes - including principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, school social workers, department chairs, paraprofessionals, psychologists, and supervisors. Of course, be sure to follow local policies on who can supervise groups of students.
- Find funds for substitute teachers - some sources include grants from your state or local foundations, parent-teacher organizations, and disability advocacy groups.
- Utilize retired teachers.
- Begin each class period with independent work time. Have a partner learning activity or a problem or assignment on the board. Students are to complete the independent work while the teachers do informal planning.
- Use instructionally relevant videotapes or other programs supervised by part of the staff to release the other part of the staff for planning.
- When school-based staff development sessions are scheduled, arrange for them to begin late or conclude early with the saved time being used to collaborate.
- Experiment with a late arrival or early dismissal day. This time can occur once a week, once a month, or once a grading period. Typically, the school day is lengthened and the additional minutes are “banked” to provide the release. The time

created must be used in working with colleagues. It is not to be used as additional individual preparation time nor is it time to be spent on large-group, formal meetings.

- Stay late after school once per month, but make it enjoyable by bringing snacks, music or other pleasant “atmosphere” items. If you bring walking shoes, you can accomplish both exercise and collaboration.
- Treat collaboration as the equivalent of school committee responsibilities, especially if you are operating a pilot program. Time that others in school spend in committee meetings is spent working collaboratively.
- For special educators, reserve time in the daily schedule that is not obligated to specific responsibilities. Use this time flexibly with lunch, planning, and other time to meet with teachers.
- Request release from particular duties in order to make up for the extra time that planning for co-teaching takes.
- Utilize summer planning to plan for the first grading period using IDEA, foundation, or professional development funds.
- Provide after school sessions with continuing education credits earned for recertification.
- Pay a small stipend for after-school planning.

Class composition in inclusive schools is also an important issue. Which students should be in an inclusive classroom? Classes should not be a “dumping ground.” Several considerations are noted below.

- Class sizes need to be about the same as for classrooms without students with disabilities.
- One incentive to encourage inclusive classrooms could be slightly smaller class size.
- One thing that should be avoided is the “stapled to the bottom” class list.
- Both teachers’ names should be included on the student schedule.

Some principals have eliminated the special education department and assigned special education teachers to English, mathematics, science, and history departments. These special educators become part of the academic department and “live” within the department. If this is done, it is important to have a special education planning room where all records are centrally located and all teacher schedules are on the wall.

Dr. Friend’s final advice was for principals to reflect on three questions:

1. What are we doing well? Recognize and celebrate your successes. Share successful practices. Use your best teachers and their ideas as a model to help others improve. Sometimes, your best staff development is already in your building.
2. What are we not doing well? You need to identify areas of weakness and create a vision of where the school needs to go. You have to help teachers understand how things can improve if we make needed changes. Sharing student outcome data with teachers over time can accomplish this.

3. What do we need? To bring about change, you have to identify resources that are needed, and you have to engage your central office and your leadership teams in determining how you can get the resources you need.

Factors Critical to Systems Change

In the National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP) *Breaking Ranks II* for high school leaders and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* for middle school leaders, there is a module on change. That module identifies five factors that are critical to bringing about systemic change. Those factors include: vision, skills, incentive, resources, and action plan. To truly bring about a collaborative culture in schools, principals must address each of the change factors. You must create a vision for what the school can become if a collaborative culture is developed. You have to make sure that both your regular education and special education teachers have the skills necessary for success. If they do not have those skills, you have to teach them. You have to provide an incentive for change, which could be as simple as making AYP or as complex as a career ladder. You must have the resources necessary to actually implement the change which may require conversations outside your school. Finally, you must develop an action plan to make sure that it happens. Attention to these five factors will increase the probability that the change will occur, but for it to be sustained, collaboration must become part of the culture of the school.

Perhaps the best reason for developing collaborative cultures is best summed up by the cartoon character Ziggy when he said, "Some of us are more capable than most of us, but none of us is as capable as all of us." Our ultimate goal is for ALL of us to work together to improve achievement for all students.

Workshop Participants' Comments

At the end of each of the workshops, school principals and other participants were asked to provide feedback about strengths, weaknesses, and resources. They were given an opportunity to respond to three questions: 1) What were they doing well? 2) What were they not doing well? 3) What did they need to be successful? The comments from all groups have been consolidated and are listed below.

Things that are being done well (Strengths):

- When a special education teacher has an inclusion class, he/she learns the content and can carry the content back to the self-contained class if they have one.
- Common planning time is provided to all teachers who teach in an inclusion setting. Records are kept to document planning time.
- In a block schedule, students can be grouped and regrouped as needed. Students can be moved as needed, and the best teachers can be put in front of the most needy students. Teachers are encouraged to be creative with time to meet student needs.

- In addition to inclusive classes, special education teachers have an advisory period for students in their block where students have directed study.
- The middle school SRA program has produced positive results. Trained paraprofessionals work with students in the program.
- All language arts teachers collaborate with special education teachers. Different grouping strategies are utilized, and SOL scores jumped from 73% to 91%.
- The Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) has increased student achievement.
- Special education teachers are assigned to departments, and they are treated as members of the department, not special education teachers.
- Summer planning to develop the special education schedule helps the year begin on a positive note.
- Using a variety of grouping strategies is important. Students may be in regular classes, inclusive classes with the special education teacher and the regular education teacher, or in an inclusive classroom with a paraprofessional providing support.
- Full inclusion classrooms are important for student achievement. Training/Technical Assistance Centers (T/TAC) can be very helpful in this process.
- Accurate identification of students with disabilities is critical. It is counterproductive to put students in special education if they have a reading or a behavior problem.
- Teachers have the attitude that they will do whatever is necessary for children to succeed.
- High expectations for all students are important.
- Every teacher believes that students are not “mine” or “yours.” There is collective agreement that students are “ours.”

Areas where improvement is needed (Weaknesses):

- While inclusive classes are the goal, scheduling is difficult. It is possible to end up with inclusive classes that are 40-50% special education. Limited staff is contributing to the problem.
- Teaming teachers is very important. Both regular and special education teachers need more training to identify what is good instruction in an inclusive classroom.
- Teachers need training.
- There are no bells in the school, and each grade follows a separate schedule. This means that teachers cannot cross grade levels.
- Provide training for school boards and superintendents so they will understand the reality of what is happening and what schools are trying to accomplish.
- Include the parents in the training process so they also understand the goals.
- Special education teachers often do not keep regular education teachers in the loop. Schools try to implement change without collaboration.
- Collaboration and inclusion occur most often in core academic classes. However, both are also needed in elective courses like art, family life, and architectural drawing.
- Before NCLB, the IEP drove instruction for students with disabilities. Now it seems like NCLB is driving the instruction.
- Some school divisions have vocational centers located at a central site, and there are

no special education teachers in that school. Not having special education teachers at a vocational center is a weakness.

- There is a shortage of special education teachers. With provisional licensure, many teachers are not trained for what they are going to face.
- Often parents do not understand the concept of inclusion or the options available for their child. We need to give better information to parents.
- Teacher preparation programs have not made the shift to the inclusion model. Colleges and universities must prepare graduates for the real classroom experience.
- There is not enough planning time for teachers. Teachers have to attend so many after hour sessions to become highly qualified and that leads to teacher burnout.

What do you need (Resources):

- Quicker turn around time for assessment data is needed. While the strand analysis is helpful, an item analysis would be more valuable.
- A special education administrator or coordinator in each building to oversee implementation of special education services.
- A data coordinator in each building to be responsible for data analysis.
- More emphasis on transition and vocational support for students not seeking a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma.
- More focus on job training for students with disabilities.
- Longitudinal data is needed to track individual student improvement.
- The state should be providing benchmark tests to help monitor student progress.
- Too much time is spent on testing. Focus should be on alternative assessments like portfolios or real world applications.
- Higher salaries would keep more teachers in the profession. We lose so many new teachers.
- There should be some monetary bonus for teachers in schools that are successful.
- There is a gap between regular Standards of Learning (SOL) requirements and Virginia Grade Level Alternative Assessment (VGLA) and Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP). The state needs to look at the students who do not qualify for VSEP and VGLA but still struggle to achieve passing SOL scores.
- Affordable staff training for all special education teachers prior to the beginning of school is needed if we are going to be successful. It would be great to have an overview, followed by monthly in-depth sessions on different topics.

About the Editors

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